

Not a Dream, but a Nightmare

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/24928801) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/24928801>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Video Blogging RPF
Relationship:	Clay Dream/GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF)
Character:	Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Darryl Noveschosch , Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF)
Additional Tags:	Victorian era , Alternate Universe - Serial Killers , Detectives Sapnap and BBH , Inventor George , Serial Killer Dream , Blood , Murder , Attempted Murder , Stockholm Syndrome , Angst , Falling In Love , Epilogue includes WW1 because that's how history works , Mask and Goggles
Language:	English
Collections:	Wolfis Minecraft Library
Stats:	Published: 2020-06-26 Completed: 2020-07-05 Words: 19,725 Chapters: 10/10

Not a Dream, but a Nightmare

by [amooniesong \(orphan_account\)](#)

Summary

“The card?” Darryl asked, examining the body from several steps away. One of the younger officers leaned over the body, reaching into the dead man’s pocket and revealing the card. He offered it to Darryl who took it without question, looking at the familiar smile in the bottom right hand corner.

“Turn it over.” The constable prompted, and he did. His eyes widened, Nicholas audibly gasping as they looked at the other side of the card.

“A message?” Nicholas said, the two detectives looking to the constable.

“Clearly, our killer thinks we need some help with his little game.”

Dream Team Serial Killer AU set in Victorian England.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1

“Nicholas.”

Darryl glanced up from his desk, observing as the younger man removed his jacket and removed his pocket-watch from his vest, glancing at the time and raising a hand apologetically.

“Sorry, Darryl, I hope I haven’t kept you waiting too long.”

Darryl cleared his throat, sitting back in his chair and holding out a folded piece of paper for Nicholas. He watched the man carefully for a moment, slowly reaching forward and taking the document from him. The wax seal on the back had already been broken, Darryl had clearly already read the contents of the letter and judging by the quiet greeting he’d been given, it wasn’t good news.

“What is it?” Nicholas asked, beginning to scan over the letter but wanting Darryl to fill him in with the details more quickly. If he’d already kept the man waiting, there was no sense in prolonging that.

“A letter from the constable.” Darryl explained. “They’ve found another one.”

Nicholas lowered the letter, raising his eyebrows questioningly.

“I thought they increased patrols... Are they sure it’s him?”

“Apparently it’s all been done in the same way again. They’ve asked us to take a look at the scene, see if there’s anything we can figure out.”

“Darryl, as much as I want to keep helping with these cases, do you really think there’s anything more we can do?”

“They keep paying us, I see no harm in offering our assistance.” He replied. “A cab is arriving for us in a few minutes. You’ll want to grab your coat again, the body hasn’t been moved yet and apparently was covered in a thin layer of snow from the night before. And before you ask, there

were no footprints. Our killer struck before the snow fell, there was no trace.”

Nicholas nodded, pulling a handkerchief from his pocket and dabbing at his forehead before turning to grab his jacket once more. Darryl stood from behind his desk, grabbing his own coat and scarf. He took his satchel from his seat and grabbed his hat as he exited the building, wandering down a narrow flight of stairs to exit out into the alley as the cab arrived. The driver waved to Nicholas and Darryl from where he sat, offering them a courteous smile.

“The constable is looking forward to seeing the two of you today.” He called down to them. “Really thinks you might be able to hit a breakthrough. The sooner the better, my wife will hardly leave the house unaccompanied. Hates it when the children go to work - always thinks one’ll go missing.”

“Good morning.” Nicholas called back, allowing Darryl to clamber into the cab first before settling himself beside. “We’ll certainly be doing our best Sir, anything to keep the streets of this city safe.”

There was a grunt from behind them in response, before the crack of a whip broke the silence and the horse drawn carriage took off with a trot, jostling the inhabitants of the cart as the wheels took them through the crowded, cobbled streets of London. Nicholas looked around him as they travelled, the air filled with a dense smog as people went about their days. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary - the infamous murders had become the norm now, and if the killer hadn’t struck on your street then life seemed to go on as normal. Children and fathers went to work or school, mothers shopped, fetched water and food for their families, fixed clothes and cared for those too young to work. From here it would be impossible to tell that the city had been plagued by a string of connected murders over the last few months, the calling card of the suspect the only clue that the police and detectives had to go off. A simple piece of white card, cut into a neat rectangle, with a smile drawn in ink in the corner - as if the man had signed off his name.

It was a little over twenty minutes to arrive at the scene of the murder, the crowds thinning out substantially as they neared the alley. Nicholas and Darryl were greeted by the constable taking their hands and shaking them enthusiastically - far too enthusiastic for a man who would’ve begun his morning being informed of yet another death. They were taken to a body, left lying on its back in the street in the signature fashion of this killer.

If it wasn’t for the fact that the man had his throat slit, it would’ve been easy to assume that he had simply fallen asleep. Nothing was out of place. His shirt still tucked into his trousers, waistcoat and jacket still buttoned up and his hair neat. There was no sign of a struggle, he had been killed and gently laid in the snow, hands crossed over his stomach and resting - unmoving.

“The card?” Darryl asked, examining the body from several steps away. One of the younger officers leaned over the body, reaching into the dead man’s pocket and revealing the card. He

offered it to Darryl who took it without question, looking at the familiar smile in the bottom right hand corner.

“Turn it over.” The constable prompted, and he did. His eyes widened, Nicholas audibly gasping as they looked at the other side of the card.

“A message?” Nicholas said, the two detectives looking to the constable.

“Clearly, our killer thinks we need some help with his little game.”

“So he’s given us a name? Of him? His next victim?”

“That’s what we’d like you to find out for us. Whatever you require we can accommodate, and we’ll pay handsomely for your efforts of course. Would you?”

Nicholas looked to Darryl, and the man nodded.

“We’ll examine here a while longer then return to our office to work. Could you spare an officer or two to help us track down anyone that will help with our investigation?”

“Of course sir, whatever it takes. We’ll find the bastard that’s been haunting these streets, we’ll keep our city safe at night once more.”

The constable shook both their hands, instructing his officer to remain with the men and to let him know if anything further was required, before excusing himself to return to his own duties. As he wandered away, Nicholas turned Darryl and worried his bottom lip between his teeth.

“He wouldn’t give us his name, would he?”

“I can’t picture a killer named--”

###

“George!” The barmaid called, smiling at the man from across the room as she wandered towards him with a tray of beers. The bustle of her dress helped to part her way through the crowd of drunken men, cheering and swaying as the night roared on. “I almost thought you weren’t comin’ in tonight.”

Her cockney accent brought a smile to George’s face, taking a beer from her tray and passing her a coin for her troubles. “I can’t stay long, I’m on the brink of something incredible.” He said. His accent was different from hers, much more formal - but that was a given for a man like him.

“You inventors! You’re *always* on the brink of somethin’, stay a little longer - for little ol’ me?” She asked, bringing her free hand to his cheek and giving him gentle puppy eyes for a moment before the smile returned and she patted his cheek twice with her hand as she saw him succumb to her ask. “That’s what I like. I’ll be behind the bar in a while, you’ll have to tell me what you’re figurin’ out.”

With that, the barmaid left and George smiled, watching as she danced happily through the crowd. The woman always seemed happy to see him, and although she seemed happy to see *everyone*, he liked to think she was particularly happy to see him. He did as he was told, sipping at his drinking slowly and making his way through the packed room of jolly friends, narrowly dodging getting involved in a bar scuffle (that the owner was already trying to move outside), making his way safely to the bar as she appeared once more, cleaning glasses with a cloth.

“So, you gonna let me in on your latest invention then?”

“You know that’s a secret, Miss Oswald.” He smiled, and she rolled her eyes - leaning over and hitting him with the cloth. It was a gentle enough hit, but still made a satisfying *thwack!*

“Never stopped you before. ‘N I’ve told you enough times to call me Clara. None of this *Miss Oswald*.”

“Fine.” He said, shifting on his stool. “But I think I’ll need another drink.”

The two of them smiled at each other, Clara pouring another beer for George as they fell into conversation. George never underestimated her ability to understand his ideas, never dumbing anything down for her. She seemed awfully well educated for a barmaid, ahead of her time and aspirational, and he assumed if he ever decided to settle down that she would make a wonderful wife. Her rebellious attitude and rejection for the norms of the world they lived in appealed to him.

And perhaps that would add to his parents dislike of him if he *did* chose to follow that path, but he had already disappointed them as he had followed his dreams of becoming an inventor - he was perfectly used to refusing to meet their standards.

The conversation lasted until Clara's shift ended. George no longer had a reason to stay, and as she grabbed her shawl he offered her his arm - for no reason than to walk her home, of course. Reports of the murder had swept the city during the day and of course, he couldn't in his right mind let her walk home alone when there was a madman on the loose.

The cold night air clung to the two of them as they left the Rose and Crown and walked, dull lamps lighting the way home as they crunched through yet another layer of fresh snow.

"You know George, I sometimes wonder if there's somethin' a little bit different about you."

"Different?" He asked, glancing down at the woman with a smile. "I'd hope there's a lot different about me. What do you mean?"

There was a pause, and the pair of them stopped walking under a flickering street light. Snow began to fall around them and for a moment, their minds both seemed to wander in the same direction. But the sound of someone else walking nearby ended the moment promptly, and George straightened his back. Any thoughts of making an advance were gone.

"We should get you home and safe." He told her. "You're freezing, we can't have that."

"Of course." She said, her tone a little disappointed as they began to walk once more.

###

The couple were followed from a distance, a man quietly lurking in the shadows, his face covered by a mask. He took great care to remain invisible as he deemed necessary, silently watching as the man saw the woman to her door. He offered her a wave as she wished him goodnight, and he continued on his path alone.

The snow was already falling. Tonight was not the night. But the killer had his next target in sight, and the game was about to become much more entertaining.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Searching for a man named George was hard work. There were plenty of George's in London, and narrowing down which to talk to had Nicholas and Darryl working long into the night. They'd traced together a history of all the killer's previous victims, trying to find some kind of pattern. They were men and women, young and old, but all were *intelligent*. It wasn't much, but there were lawyers, doctor's, people of *status* - no one that had been killed had been unknown.

"This has to be a game to him." Nicholas sighed, sitting back on his chair. "If he wanted to get away with this they'd be killing people that no one knew." He said, kicking his legs up onto his desk. "There'd be no connection, not even a *faint* one, and he wouldn't have given us a name. Maybe this is all a trick, something to confuse us and throw us off the scent while he kills someone else."

"But, if it is a game, maybe he *wants* to be caught. Maybe he likes the attention, maybe he's *bored* of playing this game alone."

"If he's caught, he'll be killed. How *bored* do you have to get to risk that?"

Nicholas looked at Darryl who sighed, letting his shoulders fall as he shook his head. "What other lead do we have? Nothing, we've nothing else to go on. At the very least, we should *try* to save this man's life."

"You think we can? Knowing that this killer is going to strike *eventually* isn't going to tell us when, or where, and we'll have no chance of saving him."

"We might be in with a chance of catching our killer, of stopping someone else from dying. Nicholas, you *have* to try." Darryl said, slamming a fist down on his desk, paperwork jumping and his pen falling from its ink pot, ink spilling on the table and Darryl groaning.

"I'm going to speak with him, like it or not. You're free to come with me, Nicholas."

"At this time of night? I'm going home to my wife." He said, standing up and brushing his hands over his suit. "But if you're willing to wait until the morning, I suppose I could come along with you."

Darryl watched as Nicholas picked up his things, bidding the younger gentleman goodnight as he left his office, and he sank back onto his seat. Nicholas was right, there was nothing they could do now, they'd have to pay the gentleman a visit in the morning. He looked down at the newspaper clipping once more, watching as the ink spilled over the mans' name. *George Hutchinson*, an inventor - albeit with limited success. He cleared his own things away, wiping down the mess from his desk before gathering his belongings and switching out the lamps in the room. It wouldn't be long until morning broke and he was to return, but for now he bid the room a fond farewell, smiling as he glanced at the order he'd created before closing the door and locking it behind him.

It was late, it had begun to snow once more, and Darryl shivered. The walk home wasn't particularly long, but it didn't mean he enjoyed it. At the other end he knew all that was waiting for him was a cold, dark, cramped home. He had focused his aspirations solely on his career, and he didn't regret that, but sometimes he envied Nicholas' comments about coming home to his wife.

Feet crunching in the snow he soon forgot about that, hearing a second set of footsteps behind him. They were just slightly out of sync with his own - enough to feel as though someone was toying with him - but he refused to give this person the upper hand. He quickened his pace, altering his route home, trying to shake whoever was following him off his tail without raising enough suspicion to force them to act. The footsteps eventually faded but Darryl didn't find any comfort in this. He was certain that whoever had been following him was still following him. Not letting down his guard he walked quickly down the last street to his home. One of the gas lanterns on the road was out of fuel and he swallowed, continuing to walk and holding his breath. Was this going to be it? Was this the killer's game?

He fumbled a hand into his pocket, pulling out the key for his door and jogging the last few steps. The street was quiet but the hairs on the back of his neck stood, his key slipping from the lock several times before he managed to insert and twist it, opening the door and stepping inside. The door closed immediately and he felt his heart quicken as he let out his breath, locking the door before bolting it shut to be doubly certain of his security.

Darryl let out a quiet sigh, rubbing his hands together for warmth and lighting several candles. He'd go to bed soon, just as soon as he felt as though he was safe in his own home.

###

"Mr Hutchinson."

George looked up. He was sat in his workshop, huddled over the designs to his latest invention - or at least the initial blueprints. The paper was covered in drawings and measurements, theories with

how everything *logically* needed to work in order for his creation to be a success. As he saw two smartly dressed men in suits approaching him he covered the papers with his hands, clearing his throat.

“Who are you?” He asked. “Because if you’re Edison’s men, *I’m not for sale* .”

The younger of the men chuckled at his words, shaking his head as the older man offered him a hand. George could see the bags under his eyes, the exhaustion in his features, and he took his hand unsurely.

“Detectives, I’m Mr Noveschosch, this is-”

“Nicholas, no need for formalities.” Nicholas extended his hand and George shook it, his brows furrowing.

“Detectives?”

“We suspect your life is in danger Mr Hutchinson.”

That caught George’s attention. He stood up, his chair scraping along the floor unpleasantly. “In... Danger?” He repeated, speaking slowly as he tried to process what had been said. “What makes you think-”

Nicholas reached into his pocket, pulling out the calling card found the day before. George looked down at the little piece of paper, blank from the angle he could see, but Nicholas motioned for him to take it. Doing as he had been silently instructed, he took the card and pinched it between his fingertips. The smile in the corner was a well known symbol by now - the sadistic signature of an unknown, unnamed killer. He swallowed, turning it over, and he looked at the back. The name *George* had been written out clear as day, the handwriting fluid and joined. The longer he looked at the card the more he realised that it was shaking, that *he* was shaking.

“You think--”

“We do.” Darryl said. “The man found yesterday had this on his person, the first time our killer has left anything other than his smile behind. We’ve done what we can to link the previous victims, *you* are most likely the next target.”

"I don't understand." George said, his voice quiet and thick with disbelief. "I'm not anything... Why would he target *me* ? I haven't done anything special, I don't have money, I don't *know* anyone that would want me dead!" He said, scrambling to piece together an explanation in his own mind.

"We want you to help us, Mr Hutchinson." Darryl continued. "If he wants you dead we can only presume his crimes will continue in the usual manner - he'll have to approach you to slit your throat. If you agree to work with us we can provide police to ensure you're never far from protection. This could be our chance to capture this man and put him behind bars."

George blinked, staring down at the card in his hands. "What if I don't?"

"He'll still kill you." Nicholas replied, his tone much more blunt than Darryl's. "But we won't be there to protect you, and he'll go on to kill again."

George glanced up to the two men. Their faces were as cold as stone, the seriousness of the situation evident by the lines that burrowed into their foreheads, the way their eyes bore into his very soul. It must have been evident to them that he was too afraid to process what he'd been told, and Darryl pulled another card from his pocket.

"Take this." He said. "Our card. Our office address is there. Take some time to think over our offer, come by later this afternoon and we'll talk more."

When George didn't take the card he sighed, leaving it on the table and pursing his lips together into a tight smile.

"Good day, Mr Hutchinson."

Darryl turned to leave with that, and Nicholas raised a hand to politely wave goodbye before following his colleague. It left George alone to consider what he had been told, the words finally beginning to click into his mind. Someone wanted him dead, if he refused their offer of help then his life would be coming to an abrupt end before he knew it.

George picked up the card from the table, scrunched up his papers and threw them aside. He grabbed his satchel and the few pieces of stationery he'd brought with him, leaving the workshop in a hurry and returning to his own home - as fast as he could in the opposite direction of the

detective's office.

#

“Mr Chilcott!” George called, stepping into the Rose and Crown. The pub was quiet and the familiar face of the young barmaid was nowhere to be seen. He had wanted to offer the woman a goodbye, telling her that he had to go *somewhere*, anything that would keep her from looking for him and putting herself in danger. The man greeted him with a friendly wave, gesturing for him to take a seat momentarily, before glancing at the way George was dressed and realising that this wasn't his usual visit.

“Off on a trip?”

“Is Ms Oswald here?” He asked, not answering his question. “I wanted to say goodbye.”

Mr Chilcott shook his head, offering a sad smile. Whatever this young man was in such a hurry for, he was sorry to see it get in the way of the pair. He'd noticed their conversations and never intruded, but always assumed there was *something* going on.

“She's not working tonight, said she was out of town visiting family.” He explained, and George cursed under his breath. “If you want to leave her a note...”

George found the suggestion a relief, quickly taking out a piece of paper and a pencil from his satchel, scribbling a short note. He looked up at the man standing over him and he smiled.

“I won't read it, if that's what you're thinking.” He replied, answering George's silent question. He finished the end of his note, folded it in half and wrote her name on the front with a single cross underneath.

“Thank you Sir.” He said, tossing him a coin. “Thank you kindly.”

“Take care of yourself, I'm sure Clara will be glad to see you in one piece when she's back.”

George nodded curtly rather than offering up a proper goodbye, before turning on his feet and

hurrying himself out of the pub. He didn't want to miss an opportunity to speak with the detectives before they left their office for the night - if he didn't speak with them then it would be a night without protection, a night that the killer could strike, and just the thought of it had his heartbeat racing. Clutching his bag tightly to his chest he walked with his head down, hearing the laughter of children surrounding him as they played in the snow filled streets. It had him on edge, *everything* did. He stumbled on a loose cobble and tripped a few steps forward. His stomach tied into terrifying knots as his mind raced to figure out if the cobble had been sabotaged, if the killer had changed his tactics.

No , he thought to himself, *that couldn't be the case.*

But he could feel eyes on the back of his head. In this street full of carefree children and happy families, someone was looking at him. The feeling of sickness only rose inside as he continued down the road, his hands trembling as he clung to his bag. He breathed in and out slowly, the sickening miasma around him almost soothing his nerves. The sooner he could speak to the detectives, the better. He'd be safe once he'd spoken to them.

They *promised* he'd be safe.

He had to be safe.

Right?

Chapter End Notes

Upload schedule? Who is she?! I'm enjoying writing this far too much and I'm too excited about sharing this with you all to share this out! I'm currently in insane pain so I'm just writing loads of it to try and block it out haha!

CONGRATS TO GEORGE ON 1 MILLION TODAY! LET'S GOOOOOOOOOOO!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, this is an intermission brought to you by COPPA on behalf of the FTC. This fanfic is not for FUCKING KIDS--

Okay jokes aside, please remember this is a Serial Killer AU before reading any further! That becomes a bit more apparent towards the end of this chapter, just in case anyone wants to back out now! Also to note that I've updated this work to M. I don't think this chapter is quite enough to warrant that rating but that gives me a bit more room to play with the serial killer stuff and I'm enjoying it a worrying amount!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Nicholas!”

It was Nicholas' turn to close up the office, the door locking with a satisfying click as he heard his name called from across the street. Glancing over his shoulder, his scarf twisting with movement, he saw George running towards him.

“Mr Hutchinson.” Nicholas replied, his voice only slightly raised as George quickly closed the gap between them. “How are you?” He asked, as if he hadn't been there to deliver the news of his likely demise a mere few hours ago.

“Am I too late?” George asked breathlessly, panting as he came to a stop a few paces in front of Nicholas. “Please... Tell me I'm not too late.”

“I'm afraid Darryl has gone home for the evening.”

“But you're here.” He said, assuming that Darryl had been the more formal Mr. Noveschosch. “Can't you help, please, whatever it takes.” He told him, a beat passing before he scrambled to open his satchel. His fingers trembled as he tried to undo the clasp, the device causing more trouble than he was used to before it clicked open. He reached into his bag and pulled out a small leather wallet, pulling out what he could afford. He glanced into his hand, counting the coins and paper, and reached back in. Perhaps he *couldn't* afford this but his life was on the line. Holding out his hand he looked up to Nicholas with a pleading look in his eyes. “*Please*.” He begged.

“George, the constable is covering our expenses.” Nicholas replied. “You have no need to pay for

our services.” He reassured the man, and he saw a wave of relief passing over his body. His shoulders sagged and relaxed, his eyes softened and his jaw unclenched. “Come on in, I’ll make you some tea and phone for Darryl to return.”

He unlocked the door and gestured for George to step inside first. He did, the warmth of the office and the relief of simply not being within the killer’s grasp any longer washed over him. The trembling in his fingers appeared to lessen and he walked several steps inside, Nicholas closing the door beside him and taking off his hat, scarf and coat. He left his satchel by the door, waving George towards their desks.

“Take a seat. Try and relax a little. I’ll be with you in a few minutes.”

Nicholas left the small office, leaving through another door to take him further into the building, and George was left alone. He felt his anxiety begin to rise again, nausea rising in his throat that he battled to keep down. He crossed slowly to a seat beside one of the desks, placing his satchel on the floor beside it before he began to unbutton his coat. He could hear his heart beating in his ears as he slipped out of his coat. He folded it neatly, laying it over the back of the seat, before settling down. As soon as he did his leg began to shake, foot tapping on the floor out of worry. He swallowed as the side door opened again, forcing himself not to jump as Nicholas reentered with a tray - a pot of tea brewing and two cups beside it, a pot of sugar cubes and a small jug of milk finishing off the tray.

“Have you eaten?” Nicholas asked, setting the tray down on the desk. He sat in his own seat behind it, pouring out the two cups of tea and signalling for George to help himself to milk and sugar. “You look as though you’re about to faint. Take one of these.” He said, taking the lid off a small metal box on his desk and pushing it towards him. George silently took one, not needing further invitation. Sucking on the small sweet gave him something to focus on, and it made his hands a little steadier as he poured milk into his own cup. He dropped several cubes of sugar into his tea, not particularly caring for its flavour but grateful for the warmth.

“Darryl will be with us shortly. We’ll see what we can do to keep you safe this evening, but we’d like, tomorrow, to try something different. We want to provoke the killer into making his move on you. We’ll have officers standing by to intercept as soon as anything happens.” He told him. “We’ll discuss it more later, but I wanted you to have some time to consider before.”

George moved a second hand to cradle his cup of tea, the warmth spreading through his hands and up his arms as he nodded. It didn’t feel real, everything around him seemed to be happening both too quickly and too slowly, like he was trapped in some kind of horrible dream, some kind of *nightmare*. He looked over Nicholas’ shoulder, staring silently out of the window as the wind picked up and snow swirled around. It was nearing Christmas and the infectious laughter of the children outside carried through the thin walls of the building, but he couldn’t smile. He just wanted to wake up from this, he wanted to be in his workshop working on another invention, in the

bar speaking with Clara, he didn't want *this* .

But he didn't have the luxury of a choice.

#

The evening had passed slowly, he found himself accompanied to his home by an officer that - if the killer had decided to strike - he had no confidence in his ability to protect him. Walking through the snow he almost felt as if he would have felt safer on his own, as if being with this officer would only draw more attention to him - and the killer would decide that this was the game he wanted to play - but nothing happened. He made it home safely, the walk uneventful, and he said his goodbyes to the officer. As he closed and locked the door behind him he sighed, closing his eyes for a brief moment as he processed the events of the day. Discovering that someone wanted him dead, speaking with the detectives, organising a plan to try and tempt the killer into making his move the next day, it all seemed too much for just one day and if all went according to plan, by tomorrow the entire thing would be resigned to his memory.

He wandered through his small home, turning on gas lamps to light the place up a little. He'd rushed home from the workshop to pack his things earlier, in case the detectives suggested he leave the city that evening, and he found that everything he had decided he could leave behind was strewn just as messily as he'd left it. Failed blueprints littered the floor, rejected patents sitting on his table, he walked passed them all and into his small kitchen where he glanced at the food he had, before his stomach churned and reminded him that his anxieties, while lessened, were still very much keeping him from eating. So instead he sat down at his table, his head in his hands. Normally he would sit and think, try to brainstorm some new idea, but all he could do now was breathe and let time pass around him.

He had no idea how long he had sat there, but the world outside his home was still dark when the creak of a floorboard brought him out of his own mind. His body jolted and he was suddenly awake and afraid, getting to his feet and reaching for a butchering knife he kept for cooking. Armed, he picked up one of his lanterns and began to creep around his own home, as if he were an uninvited guest wanting to remain unseen.

Another creak came from upstairs and George twisted around immediately, swallowing and repositioning the knife in his hand. His stairs creaked, he knew that the killer, if he was *really* up there, would have the upper hand the moment he heard George approaching. But he had a knife, and if he remained downstairs surely he'd let his guard down or fall asleep, and then it would be even easier...

Taking in a breath and holding it, George slowly started to creep up the stairs, conscious of every sound he was making. The lantern helped him see a little in front of him, helping his eyes to scan

his surroundings. The room upstairs was empty, although his window was wide open. Still holding the knife tightly, he carefully crossed the room, placing the lamp on the windowsill before poking his head outside and looking at the street below. He could see two sets of footsteps in the snow. His own, leading to his front door, and that of the officer that had accompanied him home - side by side with his, and then leading away. There was nothing else there, no extra tracks, no one hanging on to the edge of his home - he was safe. George let out his breath with a sigh, taking a step back and closing the window. His mind was playing tricks on him, the situation alone was enough to terrify him into believing all sorts of terrible things.

He picked up his lantern again, heading back downstairs to return the knife to the kitchen and turn off his lights. He could still hear the creaking above him but knew now it was just his own mind, though knowing that didn't seem to calm his thoughts at all. Falling asleep was going to be damn near impossible and he was already exhausted. He trudged back upstairs with heavy feet, not taking the same precautions as he had before, and he yawned loudly. He stood beside his bed and stretched, arms reaching above his head as he cracked his aching bones, before starting to undress. As he took off his waistcoat he shivered, the cool night air that had been creeping in through his window had made the room substantially colder and he glanced across to it, frowning. He thought he'd closed it.

He walked back to the window, looking outside once more to calm the thoughts that maybe, *just maybe*, he'd missed seeing something, but there was nothing. As he closed the window he slid it up and down a few times, wondering if it had come loose and was being blown back up by the wind - though the wind wasn't that strong, and the window seemed to stick in place just fine. It must have been his mind playing tricks on him again. George made sure to close his window properly, turning around to continue preparing to sleep.

His hands dropped to his waist, untucking his shirt from his trousers and pulling at the hem with both hands. As he lifted the shirt above his head he felt something grabbing at him - an arm wound around his stomach, a gloved hand pressing against the soft skin of his navel... With his shirt half way over his head he was blinded, and he felt something sharp and cold press through the fabric against his throat.

The movement was quick, the sickening sound of skin slicing echoing in his mind. He wondered where the noise had come from, until he coughed. It was wet, thick with blood, and he realised it had been the sound of his own throat being slit. His knees sagged and the arm around his stomach held him upright, pressing his back tightly against a man. Whoever was holding him was taller than him, and he felt the man lean in behind him and whisper into his ear.

Whatever was said, he didn't hear. His mind was swimming and his consciousness was dimming, fading out of existence. A second hand moved to hold him, this hand placed higher on his chest over his slowly beating heart. As he coughed again and more blood began to trickle over his lips and down his chin he felt everything grow cold and foggy, until everything disappeared.

That should have been the end of George Hutchinson's journey, but it had only just begun.

Chapter End Notes

>:)

edit: i'm starting to plan for my manhunt au which i'll be working on after this fic.
someone's going to die at the start (and the survivors will be left to find a way to bring
their friend back) - help me decide who to kill!

<https://twitter.com/AmelieSong2/status/1277322006174879745>

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“I’m concerned.”

Nicholas looked up from his paperwork, watching as Darryl paced the floor of their office. The room was small and at first the sound of his walking back and forth had been irritating, but Nicholas had been able to quickly block the noise out and work.

“Why are you concerned?” He asked, setting his pen down with a sigh and clasping his hands together. He knew that if he didn’t give Darryl his full attention it would only make the man *more* anxious, and he didn’t want to deal with that for the rest of the day.

“We’ve not heard from George, it’s almost midday. Why isn’t he here?”

“Perhaps he had things to do this morning?” Nicholas suggested, offering a gentle shrug of his shoulder. “You asked him to come by today, you didn’t say this morning. Perhaps he’s decided to sleep longer since he knows he’ll be up late baiting a killer, you need to think about this more logically.”

“Logically?” Darryl stopped his pacing and raised an eyebrow. “ *Nothing* about that man was logical yesterday, you saw him just as well as I did. He was anxious, he was shaking, fidgeting, his eyes were glazed over and he was barely speaking to us - *logic* isn’t driving his actions, *emotion* is. A man faced with his own death, *that afraid* of everything, would have come to see us first thing. He should’ve been standing outside our office before we’d even opened.”

Darryl stopped speaking, looking to Nicholas and expecting him to continue the conversation from there.

“We should pay him a visit, then.” Nicholas said, slowly getting to his feet as Darryl much more quickly readied himself to leave. Nicholas was certain that he was right, that there was *nothing* to worry about, but at least proving Darryl wrong would make it considerably easier to work for the rest of the day. He grabbed his coat, watching Darryl wrapping his scarf around him as he walked past and out into the street. Nicholas brought his thumb and finger to his lips, blowing hard and whistling loudly to catch the attention of a cab. By the time Darryl had joined him in the street the horses had come to a stop outside of their office and Nicholas was already climbing aboard, providing George’s address to the driver.

It wasn't long before the cab dropped them off at George's home, the two of them stepping out into the snow. Nicholas paid the cab driver and Darryl looked at the front of his home, frowning and furrowing his brows. Somehow, he didn't think this was going to make him feel any better.

"It didn't snow last night." He said to Nicholas, raising his voice a little to be heard over the *clip clop* of horse's hooves as the cab left them behind. "There's two sets of footprints, one leading to the door, one going to the door and leaving again. I don't think George has left this morning."

"Perfect, then he's tucked up safe inside, no cause for concern." Nicholas said, gesturing a hand towards the door and inviting Darryl to knock. The older man followed the silent request, feet crunching towards the door. Something unnerved him as he raised his hand into a loose fist, and the feeling settled in his stomach as he rapped on the door three times. Nicholas joined him at his side, and Darryl looked up to him.

"I still feel as though something isn't quite right." He said, his tone a little quieter in case the door opened while they were speaking.

"Your gut is playing tricks on you, Darryl. Just take a deep breath, everything will be fine."

Darryl did as he was told, focusing his attention on the door. The two of them stood side by side in silence, but tension began to rise as time passed. Darryl found his worry increasing with every moment that passed without a response. Nicholas, however dismissive he had been at first, was beginning to feel the same way. He reached forward and knocked on the door himself, his teeth biting at his bottom lip despite the way the cold made them sting.

Another few minutes passed. Snow began to fall and both men shivered.

"Mr Hutchinson!" Darryl called, knocking on the door once more. "It's just us, Darryl and Nicholas, could you open the door Mr Hutchinson?"

Silence. There was no sound coming from inside the home, no one wandering to answer the door or yelling back in reply, and Darryl swallowed.

"I'm going to call for the constable, see if you can't get the door open." He said, raising his voice as he began to hurry away mid-conversation. By the time he had finished speaking he'd broken out into an undignified run, trying to recall where the nearest shop with a telephone would be.

Now feeling the same kind of internal dread that his colleague was experiencing, Nicholas didn't wait to think before taking a few steps back and running at the door with his shoulder. The wood splintered on the first hit, but didn't crack, and he repeated the action. It was on the third occasion that the door broke free from its hinges. Nicholas quickly entered, bringing one hand to rub at his shoulder.

"George?!" He called out, hearing no response. The air inside was as crisp and cool as it had been outside and there was no sign of any kind of recent life. No crumbs from breakfast or half melted down candles. Nicholas ran into the kitchen to confirm that the ground floor was empty, before turning back on himself and bounding up the staircase two steps at a time.

He was greeted with the sight of a neatly made bed but a crumpled waistcoat dropped on the floor. There was no obvious sign of a struggle, nothing to signal distress... Nicholas peered into a small second room and found nothing of note. The window was open, and was likely the source of the chill, and Nicholas closed it promptly.

"Nick!"

Nicholas turned around, hearing Darryl's voice calling his name. It was an incredibly rare occurrence for the older man to shorten his name, and it only served to help realise just how panicked he was.

"Upstairs." He called in response. "The place is empty."

He heard thudding footsteps impatiently climbing the stairs before he saw his colleague, the older man running a hand through his hair. He was breathing heavily, and was too concerned to even think about complaining about Nicholas' unconventional method of opening the door.

"So what's happened?" He asked, the question quite obviously rhetorical as he took the scene in. "Has he changed tact? This isn't his style. He kills, slits their throats, leaves their bodies where we can find them - he leaves a calling card, he *wants* us to play this game. Hiding a body makes no sense!" Darryl exclaimed, crossing the room to sit at the end of George's bed, resting his elbows on his knees and putting his head into his hands. He closed his eyes in thought for a moment and let out a quiet groan of frustration, unable to piece the information together. He wished he could talk to the man behind all this, even if just for a minute, just enough to understand his thinking a little bit better. He hated to admit it, but he almost *admired* the efforts he went to.

As he opened his eyes he stared down at the floor, and after a few short seconds he shifted. He crouched down on the ground, frowning at a small stain on the floorboards.

“Blood.” He said, sticking out a finger and scratching at it with his nail. “ *Dried* blood.”

“You think we’re too late?” Nicholas asked, hearing the familiar voice of the constable calling them from downstairs - the man arriving with several officers. Darryl got back to his feet, nodding quietly.

“But I think our killer is getting *slack* . We might not have him just yet, but I don’t think it’s going to be long.”

#

The world was dark and heavy, the air was thick, and pain clung to every part of George’s body.

He had woken up in a state of confusion, his mind trying hard to piece together what had happened over the last few... Hours? Days? He had no idea how long he’d been unconscious, he only knew that the last thing he had felt was--

“*You’re mine.*”

The whisper had cut through the silence, fingernails digging at his stomach through the thin fabric of a glove, the foul taste of iron in his mouth, a warm liquid dripping over his lips and down his chin. His lungs gasped for air but were instead filled with blood, and his body’s instinct to cough and splutter to try and clear his airways had proved fruitful. He was pulled against another man, the knife used to slit his throat now resting flat against his chest.

He fought against the desire to remain utterly still, pushing through the feeling of lead weighing his body down, and lifted a hand to his neck. The memory was real, his skin was swollen, hot, and painful to the touch, but the wound was closed - bumps criss-crossing the opening told him that he had been saved. He *hadn’t* died, the injury had been stitched, and yet the place he was in didn’t resemble a hospital at all.

George swung his feet to the side, forcing himself to sit upright and try to orient himself. The darkness of the room made it difficult and his head began to spin the moment he began to move.

The added dizziness only made everything worse and the next thing he knew he'd slumped forwards onto a cold cement floor, his body shaking as he began to retch. He felt bile rising from his stomach and burning his throat, splashing back at him as it hit the floor. Without having eaten anything substantial it was almost completely liquid and left an unpleasant taste of acid and blood in his mouth. It was almost enough to cause him to vomit again, but his body was too exhausted.

He pushed himself to one side, collapsing onto the floor on his back, and he tried to breathe. It had been difficult enough before, but with the thick smell of sick in the air it had become near impossible.

He was alive, he had survived the attempt on his life, but at what cost? He had no idea where he was, how long he had been unconscious, and his body was weaker than he'd ever known it to be. If he was alone in this dark room then surely it was only a matter of time before his body gave up on him anyway - he'd starve, or dehydrate, or his lungs would fail... It was an unpleasant thought, and he only wished he could have died a little bit quicker.

He closed his eyes where he lay, letting the cool cement relieve some of the heat his body was emitting, and he focused on his breathing. It was quick and shallow, but the rhythm managed to lull him into a false sense of security. He had almost fallen back to sleep when he heard faint footsteps drawing near, stopping beside him and splashing droplets of bile on his chest. He didn't particularly care, his head simply leaning away. What more could be done to him now?

Silently, the man that entered the room picked him up, one hand slipping under his legs and the other around his shoulders - George's head resting in his elbow as if the man was trying to protect the wound on his neck from reopening. As he felt himself being placed back on what he could only assume was a bed, he frowned. Was this the man that had tried to kill him? Was this someone else? Was something far, *far* worse going to become of him?

But the thought soon vanished. A soft blanket was placed over his body and a gloved hand ran through his hair. The man didn't speak, but George understood the unspoken request to sleep. Without further encouragement, he did. His dreams were filled with unanswered questions, his mind working to try and piece together the mystery of his captor. Despite it all, when he awoke he wouldn't describe it as a nightmare.

This man, this *dream*, he found himself thankful for him.

Chapter End Notes

CONGRATS ON 4 MILLION SUBSCRIBERS

DREAM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

for those interested, my twitter poll is still active to vote on who should die at the start of the manhunt au i have planned next!

<https://twitter.com/amooniesong/status/1277322006174879745>

Chapter 5

The man's body was heavy in his arms, and Clayton lowered him to the ground with the shirt still over his head - blocking his vision and catching as much of the blood as possible. As George lay dying on the floor Clayton made his way back into the shadows, collecting the tools he had brought with him to make a clean getaway.

The cleanup had become like a dance to the young man, pulling instruments from the doctors' bag he used as his disguise. With the man surely dead, he pulled the mask from his hand and placed it with his things, running gloved fingers through his hair and feeling the blood matt it together. No bother, he could deal with that when he returned home in the morning. For now, he simply crossed back to George and began to clean.

He noticed that the man was still breathing - his chest still rising and falling even as he was unconscious. No matter, he would die before long and Clayton could arrange his body as necessary. For now he simply took a cloth to wipe up the blood from the floor, seeking as always to leave behind no trace of his crime. It was entertaining to watch the police and the detectives scratching their heads, unable to piece together his methods and his intentions. But their inability to solve even the most basic of crimes had tired him - it was the reason he'd given them the name of his next victim - but even that hadn't been enough. He'd given them a name on his next calling card, *Dream*, to see what that would do. A name being published in the newspapers might trick the public into thinking the police had the faintest idea of who they were looking for, and he'd revel in their panic for a few weeks until he decided to push the line a little further. It was so much *fun* to find out how much he could get away with.

The cleanup didn't take long, he was used to what needed doing by now and worked on autopilot for the most part, packing his things away and even taking time to rinse his own hands before putting his gloves back on. He'd barely broken a sweat as he'd worked, but he was faced with a new problem.

George wasn't dead.

Unconscious, yes, but he was still breathing. The bleeding from his neck had started to slow down and Clayton found himself truly *nervous* that he'd gotten this wrong. He swallowed, shifting uncomfortably as he tried to think of how to best address the situation.

He could stab him again, finish him off, but the murder wouldn't fit the pattern, it would look *shabby*, and he didn't want the police to think they were getting to him. Alternatively, he could leave him, but something told him an incomplete murder would be worse than one that didn't fit the pattern. Leaving him also carried the risk that George *had* caught a glimpse of him, or would remember his voice, and that could lead the police to him. He wanted to play a game, but he

wasn't going to make it *easy* .

And so the third option he considered was a little more complicated. He could take George with him, kill him at home. The man was pale from blood loss and clearly not regaining consciousness anytime soon, Clayton had time to take him home under the cover of darkness, and killing him in his basement would give him a second chance at doing so without risking discovery.

He sighed. He didn't *like* the idea of taking a body home with him, but he felt as though he had no other choice. He put his gloves back onto his hands before pulling his bag over his shoulder, looking at the man - shirt still wrapped around his head - and picking him up. The lack of resistance now that he was unconscious made it much easier to carry him, but he knew he'd have to hurry. Before too long people would be starting their days and the police would have an easier time catching him - and this wasn't how he wanted to go.

#

Clayton wasn't certain why he was treating George quite so gently.

He had brought the man to his home to kill him, and yet he found himself sitting on a mattress in the basement with a needle and thread, George's head in his lap as he quietly sewed the wound on his neck shut.

The morning light had begun to shine as they had arrived at his home - just a little way out of the city - and he had felt a strange twinge in his chest. Clayton had buried it down, blaming it on his anxiety about the situation, and had taken George swiftly down to the basement. The room was utterly empty aside from the one mattress in a corner, the mattress George had been placed on as Clayton had found the supplies to tend to his wound.

He was painfully aware of how many steps he'd taken to reach this point, and it confused him all the more that he hadn't stopped himself at any point. Even as he thought of this, he continued the slow motion of stitching his skin back together, fingers now ungloved and resting on the man's shoulder - holding him in place while he worked, although he didn't notice his fingers gently brushing in a comforting pattern over his skin. And if he worked a little more slowly than he possibly could have done, just to enjoy some kind of proximity to another person, then he wouldn't admit that outloud.

Once he had finished, and he no longer had a reason to remain in the basement by the side of this unconscious man, he left. He closed and locked the exit behind him - though he had no doubt that George would be too weak to make an escape if he woke up. But for now he needed to rest up

himself. Clayton never liked admitting he had any kind of vulnerability, but he was utterly exhausted. He made a note to check on George when he woke up, and tried not to think about the implications of *checking* on a man he was supposed to be murdering.

#

George awoke again, what he presumed was several hours after he had first regained consciousness. There was no light in the room he was in - it was utterly impossible to tell where he was and how long he'd been there. The smell of bile had disappeared, and he wondered if he'd just become used to it or if someone was cleaning up after him.

He swung his legs off the mattress again and felt his feet land in a puddle with a splash. *Ah*. At least he had shoes on.

This time he felt a lot less nauseous and he managed to stand up, although his legs still felt awfully weak and he found himself leaning against a wall for support. He brought one hand to his throat, the tips of his fingers gently hovering over the stitches in his skin as he found himself in deep thought. He was an inventor, he was *smart*, surely he would be able to figure a thing or two out about his surroundings? Maybe the man from before would return - maybe he would stay longer this time, long enough for George to ask questions. Maybe he would *answer* those questions...

But why would he? As far as he knew, he was supposed to be dead - if his would-be murderer had kept him alive he was almost certain it was an accident, and that questions wouldn't be answered. Except that only made him more curious - if the man from earlier *was* the man that had tried to kill him, why hadn't he finished the job? Why had he brought him here - wherever here was - and stitched his wound shut?

George could've stood and asked himself questions for hours more, but he heard movement outside: footsteps, the sound of keys in a metal padlock, and he froze. Should he pretend to be asleep? Would whoever entered make yet another attempt on his life - had the bastard behind all this wanted him *conscious* for his demise? He took in a breath, pinning his body flat against the wall as if that would make any kind of difference.

A lock clicked, a door opened, and light streamed in. George took the opportunity to look around the room he was in. It was completely empty, with the mattress he'd slept on in the corner and a blanket scrunched up at the end nearest the wall. He could see the pool of vomit from earlier, the light refusing to reflect off it made him assume it had dried. The light came from a door that was accessed by a steep set of stairs - easy enough to drag himself out of, but it was unlikely the door would be unlocked if he tried to make an escape (and if it was, he had no idea what horrors could be awaiting him on the other side).

A figure walked through the door and closed it behind him - George could only assume that this was the man from before. He picked up a small lantern from the floor, lighting it to guide himself down the stairs. In his other hand was a tray - a tray with *food* on. The food looked hot, and George found his stomach growling. The man stopped moving, looking towards him as if to say *you're awake*, except he said nothing. In fact, through the glow of the lantern George realised he couldn't see his face at all. He wore a mask, white and smooth, with two small holes for eyes and an ominous smile painted on, and George found himself taking a few steps away as he approached.

The man continued in silence, unmoved, placing the tray of food down at the end of his bed.

"Is it poisoned?" George asked, trying to make himself sound brave. Instead, he found that his voice was barely more than a whisper, and that talking had made the wound on his throat flare up painfully. He coughed in response, a weak sound that only served to make his entire body shake.

The man that had brought the food to him said nothing, instead looking up and staring from across the room.

"That food." George said, forcing himself to speak a little louder despite the pain it caused. "Is it for me? H-have you poisoned it?"

Still no response. George could tell now that he wasn't going to get a word out of the man, but he persevered.

"Who are you? Where am I? *Why have you let me live?*"

The last question seemed to strike a chord, George watched as the man's figure straightened at the question. Instead of replying to George he simply turned away, his figure silhouetted against the dim light from the lantern as he returned up the stairs, promptly leaving what George could only assume was the basement. As the door opened and closed a chill filled the room and he found himself drawn to the food that had been left for him.

If it was poisoned, at least he would be warmed before he died.

Still, as he allowed himself to eat it, he had a strange feeling that his death wasn't going to find him anytime soon.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Clayton had no one to kill tonight.

Not that he *had* no one to kill, it would be incredibly easy to pick a target and kill them as he pleased - he'd only gotten to where he was now *because* it was so easy. He had no one to kill because he hadn't picked a new target, his mind was still thoroughly consumed by George.

George was an enigma. He had been Clayton's target, just another victim as he played the game he designed, but George had survived the attempt on his life and had suddenly become something so much *more*. He was a mystery, something Clayton wanted to uncover. He was a captive, *his captive*, currently kept locked away in his basement. As he sat in his kitchen with a candle lit in front of him, light flickering across his face, he came to the conclusion that he no longer had the intention of killing the man that lay beneath his home.

That created a problem.

If he didn't kill George he would either keep him captive for the rest of his life, or the man would escape and foil his plans. The game wasn't as fun if he would lose it by simply refusing to kill this one man, even if his mind was set on letting him live.

In fact, to prove to himself that he was entirely capable of killing George, he would do it now.

Clayton blew out the candle, getting to his feet with a huff and examining the counter beside him. A selection of knives - some used for cooking, some used for killing - laid out to choose from. He extended a hand, his fingers running softly over each blade before he picked one. It was an older knife, one he had fond memories of, but with time it had become blunt and rusted. Not only would this *prove* he could still kill the man, it would kill him painfully, it would bring him more joy than keeping the man alive ever could. With his knife chosen he walked through the quiet of his home - eerily devoid of furnishings and decorations - to the coat rack by the front door. He picked up his trusty mask, tying the ribbon behind the back of his head to hold it in place, before slipping his gloves onto his hands - he wasn't making a journey into the city and had no need to take his cloak or bag.

As he stepped outside he felt the chill of the air biting - it was late at night and the days seemed to be getting shorter and colder with every passing day. He crept quietly round to the back of his

house, managing not to disturb his horses as they slept, and found himself at the entrance to his basement. He unlocked the door quietly, the single key slipping silently into his pocket, before picking up the small lantern he kept by the door and letting himself in.

The basement was small and from where he stood, the lantern managed to bathe the entire room in a dull light. George was sleeping from what he could see, curled up on the mattress with the blanket held close to his body. He must be cold, and Clayton frowned. Then he realised he was *caring* about the man and his frown deepened. He was here to kill him, to end this problem once and for all so he could focus on the game again.

He made his way down the stairs slowly, his footsteps quiet against the cement floor. He placed the lantern at the foot of the stairs, giving him one hand free to maneuver George's body into an easier position. As he approached he could hear the sound of George snoring softly, a quiet noise that he would've missed if he hadn't been taking his time. In fact, if he looked hard enough, he could watch as his nostrils flared and his lips parted with each breath - even down to the twitch of his eyebrows as his dreams affected his unconscious body.

But he was here to kill George, not watch him sleep. He pocketed his knife, moving his hands to George as he pried the blanket out of his grip, pulling it back and pushing it away. The man had been in the same clothes for several days and it was obvious, his shirt covered in blood and disheveled, his trousers covered in dirt and vomit, but Clayton forced himself to look past it. He didn't care, he was about to kill the man. His hands moved to press against George's shoulders, wanting to shift him upright, and George immediately awoke. His eyes snapped open, the gentle snoring now replaced with quick, shallow breaths - fearful as to what his captor would do to him. At least if he was awake it would be easier to get him into position.

Keeping hold of him with one hand, Clayton grabbed the knife with the other and raised it to George's chin, the tip of the blade just barely putting pressure against his skin. George's eyes widened and he found himself moving backwards until his body was utterly pressed against the wall behind him, his eyes closing tightly as his breathing became louder.

Clayton leaned in, applying just a little more pressure to the knife as he did so - enough to puncture a tiny hole in his skin. As he leaned in he could see George more clearly through the small holes of his mask, his teeth poking out to bite his bottom lip softly, holding in a whimper as tears leaked from the corners of his eyes. He was afraid, *this* was what Clayton had wanted, and yet he found that seeing George cry elicited some strange kind of feeling in his stomach. He pushed the knife deeper, the cut widened, George let out a muted cry of pain and the feeling only seemed to intensify.

"You're *mine* ." He hissed, repeating the same words he had used only a day prior, before he pulled the knife away from George and pocketed it again. He stood up, straightening his back and moving away from the man. Without another word, without hesitation, he left, and George was alone in the

dark once more.

George's heart was racing. He'd barely been awake for a minute and yet he already had so much to process, *too much*. The man had returned, a knife held to his throat, a threat whispered and then... He left. As he felt his heartbeat and his breathing beginning to calm down he brought a shaking hand up to his chin, wiping at the blood that had pooled, wiping his hand on his shirt, then searching for the cleanest part of his shirt to bring to his skin to try and stem the bleeding.

He cried silently in the dark basement, without any view of the outside world he couldn't pinpoint exactly how long he spent like that but it felt as though it must have been hours - it was certainly until he ran out of tears to cry. While he'd been given something to eat earlier it had been over a day since he'd had something to drink, and he was just beginning to realise how sore and parched his throat was. But for now he was alone, with nothing to drink and no way of acquiring anything to drink. Maybe the next time the man returned he could ask for something - he was certain the man would return again, and even if he *hurt him* maybe he could be accommodating, too.

He felt his mind beginning to cloud once more and, without much other option, George lowered himself onto his mattress once more, tugging his blanket around his body and closing his eyes. Sleep was all he had to keep himself occupied in this world of darkness. And so he fell asleep, and he dreamed of the man that had captured him once more.

#

Somehow, his sleep was peaceful.

Despite everything, his dreams of the man were calming. He found himself thinking of the man carefully stitching his wound, carrying him from his home to wherever this was. Nothing this stranger had done while he was conscious had been kind to him and yet he was inventing scenarios in which the masked captor was something other than cruel. Perhaps it was his mind's way of trying to cope with the situation - giving him hope that he might not be left in darkness forever.

George woke up slowly. There was no knife at his throat, no man in a mask this time, but something *had* changed.

He could see.

When the realisation of his world no longer swimming in darkness occurred he sat up, his hands

resting on the mattress to support himself as he processed this small, yet *huge* , change. Was this a mistake? Had the man visited him in his sleep and left the lantern by accident? Curious, George pushed the blankets off himself - realising then that a second blanket had been placed over his sleeping body. So the man *had* visited him, but this gesture almost seemed *kind* . How could a killer be kind?

He got to his feet slowly, deciding silently to neatly fold both blankets individually, placing them on top of each other at the foot of his bed. His... *Bed*. The thought stopped him in his tracks - was he beginning to think of this place as some kind of home? No, it was a *prison* , he was trapped here, someone would find him eventually but this would never be his home.

George turned around to take in his surroundings, now having more time than just a brief few minutes with the man in the room with him. He saw where the lantern sat, and beside it was a small collection of things - neatly folded fabrics, a cup of water, a hunk of bread and a small piece of card. Perhaps he should have asked more questions of what these things were - and why they had been given to him - but he didn't. George immediately found himself gulping down the cup of water, his dry throat rejoicing at the soothing feel of liquid. Even as he finished what was in the cup he held it over his head with one hand, the other moving to hit the bottom of the cup several times, desperately craving every last drop. As he turned his attention to the roll of bread - picking at it and eating it crumb by crumb to savour it for as long as he could - he caught sight of the little card left on the pile of fabric. With one hand he reached out, picking up the card and turning it over. In simple, cursive handwriting it read one sentence.

My name is Clayton.

George hummed to himself, *so his captor had a name*. Clayton. Somehow, knowing that was his name made him just a little less intimidating.

He finished the food he'd been given, his throat dry once again but not quite as painfully as it had been before, and he picked up the pile of fabric he'd been given, unfolding it and feeling his eyes widen in response.

Clothes . Clayton had brought him new clothes, *clean clothes* , and without giving it a second thought he'd thrown the new clothes aside, pulling his own away from his body hurriedly. Over the last few days his clothes had become covered in blood, sweat and dirt and he was relieved to take them off. Stepping into a full set of new clothes - trousers that were a little too long and too loose, a shirt that was too big and left his chest a little more exposed than he would have liked - felt as if he had a new lease of life. It took away some of the fear he was feeling and replaced it with an odd sense of comfort. Next time he saw Clayton, he made a note to thank him for this.

It wasn't much, but it was something, and George found himself wondering if there was more to

this man than he had first expected.

Chapter End Notes

i had so much fun writing this chapter that i really hope you enjoyed reading it! seeing our dear clayton starting to struggle with his actions, and actually doing something "kind", was so fun!

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George sat quietly on the end of his bed as Clayton descended the stairs. It was dark outside, and George could only assume that meant it was evening already. Clayton still wore his mask, but with the light in the basement he could tell now that he was unarmed - there was no knife this time. Clayton had brought another tray of food with him - a hunk of bread and a bowl of steaming hot soup, as well as another cup of water. George was confused by this strange turn of events, but with the little strength he had regained from eating, and with the bravery that time had given him, he found himself *curious* more than anything.

“Thank you for the clothes, Clayton.” He said, watching as the man squatted to the ground and placed the tray there for him. There was no response, George didn’t expect there to be, but he made no immediate motion to leave. Talking to a man behind such an expressionless mask - a silent man who provided no indication of his thoughts or feelings - was a challenge, but it was one that George had no choice but to rise to.

“I’m an inventor.” He said, his eyes fixed on Clayton. The man was taller than he’d had time to appreciate before, he had a slim build and, from what George could see, light blond hair. It felt strange to think that there could be a human behind that mask, rather than just a monster, and George felt his stomach tighten at the thought. “I almost invented the flask. Some bastard in Scotland beat me to the patent.” He laughed a little, though the pain in his throat put a quick end to that action. “You know that of course. You probably know everything about me.”

Silence fell as George stopped speaking, and while Clayton didn’t respond George noticed his shoulders sag. He might not be replying, but he *was* listening. Maybe there was a way to get through to this man.

“Presumably you don’t just kill people. That’s not really the most efficient way to make a living. Do you have a career?”

George didn’t expect the question to be answered, and it wasn’t. Clayton simply reached for the tray from before, taking the empty cup into his hands and turning his back on George as he climbed the staircase to leave.

“Will you come back tomorrow, when I’m awake?”

The words left George's lips before he could stop them, his brows furrowed in confusion as he fought to understand *why* he had asked that question. Clayton must have had a similar response, pausing at the penultimate step and turning to look over his shoulder at him. George couldn't read what he was thinking, and he swallowed under his gaze, the man staring him down for several long moments before turning away and continuing to walk.

As the door to the basement was closed and locked behind him, George moved towards the food that had been brought to him. He was grateful for something warm, the basement not exactly being the most insulated of rooms, and found himself eating hungrily without a care for his situation. He could almost forget that the man bringing this to him was his captor, *almost*.

While he ate, he heard the sound of a cry and a whip, before the clatter of horses hooves took off into the night. With the speed the sound faded away George could only assume they were far out of the city - far enough out that Clayton didn't have to worry about being heard or seen as he began his journey. George wondered briefly if Clayton was intending on killing, or if he had changed his game and he would be bringing company back. He wondered if Nicholas and Darryl were speaking to another man in London to try and protect him, or if they were trying to discover his own whereabouts. It was a question he assumed he would never truly know the answer to, and he felt strangely numb - he didn't *care* if he wasn't found, because caring would mean he was hopeful to be found, and being hopeful would only leave him open to disappointment and pain.

Staying numb was, surely, the best thing to do in this situation.

###

He had failed again.

Clayton had taken care to trace his victim silently, remaining in the shadows, striking when unseen and not once using his voice. There was *nothing* that could be traced back to him, and for that he was relieved, but he had failed. While slitting the woman's throat his hand had jerked, almost unconsciously refusing to obey his orders. He *couldn't* kill her, and so he had left her face down in the snow, bleeding. He had knocked on the door of the house nearest to where her body lay and as he heard movement from the inhabitants he had fled.

She would live, he remained undetected, but he had failed.

His hands shook as he rode the short distance home, pushing his horses faster and harder as his mind raced. *How* had he failed? *Why* had he failed? And why did he have a feeling that the man in his basement had something to do with it. He had to kill George, he knew as long as the man

remained alive he would never be truly capable of killing again - realising he had a weakness in the man had exposed so many more faults within him and he could feel his mind turning against himself.

But he was a monster, a beast of the night, and he would not allow himself to be bested by some pathetic, weaselly little inventor - no matter how kindly the man had spoken to him.

That was the problem, though - George *had* spoken to him kindly. It hadn't been overtly kind, but he had been addressed as a person and that had struck something inside him. Something that needed to be snuffed out.

He jumped off his horse as he arrived at his home, barely bothering to tie her to a post before making his way to the basement. Clayton wasn't subtle or quiet, marching with heavy feet and unlocking the door hastily, throwing it open with a grunt. Despite this, he could tell that George had remained fast asleep and that somehow made things easier.

With clenched fists he descended the stairs two at a time, releasing the fingers of his right hand only to retrieve the knife from his pocket. He could do it, he *would* do it, he would put a stop to the hold his captive had over him now.

Except as he raised his hand above his head, his grip around the blade tight, he found his entire body falter. Something about the way he lay there, oblivious, his features devoid of cruelty and mistrust despite the situation he had been placed in, tightened its grip on Clayton. His determination to kill this man evaporated in a moment, he *couldn't* kill him.

His fingers flexed, tightening and loosening his grip on the blade for several moments before he lowered his arm. A sudden wave of exhaustion washed over him and he found his entire body lowering, his knees bending as he leaned back against the wall and slipped down until he sat on the ground, watching the unconscious man as he breathed. His chest rose and fell, his existence continued, and that was only because something had stopped Clayton from killing him. *Something* had forced Clayton to show mercy.

The realisation struck him like a punch to his gut, leaving him winded and dazed. Dropping the knife beside him with a clatter, his fingers reached behind him and undid the ribbon of his mask. George was asleep, he wouldn't see him, and the moment his face was free he felt able to breathe again. He took in deep breaths of air, fingers trembling as they held the mask a few inches away from his face. He could feel something else, too, wet and hot trickling down his face. Clayton wondered if he had cut himself with his knife, bringing one hand to his forehead but feeling no pooling liquid beneath his fingertips. When he felt himself hiccup and gasp for air once again he realised what it was that he could feel. He scowled, a low sound echoing from his throat like a wild animal in pain, he refused to let himself fall like this.

“I can hear that you’re crying.”

Clayton jumped back to his feet, bringing his mask back to his face and holding it in place as he glared down at the man in the bed. He had spoken, he was sure of that, but he lay there with his eyes closed.

There was a long moment of silence, during which time George sat up - there was no point in pretending to sleep anymore. He looked at Clayton, his features far too soft for a man held captive, but that was the kind of person George was. He was kind to a fault, he *cared* far too much regardless of the situation. It was how he found himself in a position of sorrow, understanding the pain that Clayton felt even if he didn’t quite grasp the context or the complexities behind it all.

“You don’t have to do this.”

That pulled at something deep inside him, and with all his might Clayton smashed the porcelain mask on the ground. It shattered into dozens of pieces and he let out another growl, taking two long strides to reach George’s side, outstretching his arm and grabbing the man roughly by the throat.

“You *don’t* control me.” Clayton hissed, squeezing tightly. The softness had left George’s features and he found himself squirming to escape from his hold. He couldn’t breathe, his face was turning redder with each second and he placed his own hands on top of Clayton’s. The contact was enough to make the man withdraw quickly, taking a number of shaky steps backwards until he tripped over his own feet. He didn’t understand what had happened, he didn’t know why he was incapable of causing any lasting harm to the man. Even as George sat afraid, coughing and panting for air, Clayton knew that he hadn’t done any true damage.

While he struggled for air, George couldn’t help but realise that he could see Clayton’s face. For the first time he had shown his true self, he had spoken, and that spoke volumes. He found that he quickly regained control of his body whereas his captor did not - sat on the concrete floor as he cried, his breathing quick and uncontrolled. *Something* inside him had changed, something had clicked into place that wasn’t there before and George wasn’t about to let the opportunity slip through his fingers.

“Clayton...” He said softly, but the man didn’t hear him. Or if he did, he wasn’t pulled away from his own tears. “Clayton.” He repeated, louder this time. “Listen to me.”

George swallowed, what was he supposed to say? It had to be meaningful, it had to be something

that stuck with the man enough that, when he left the basement, he would continue to think of. If he played his cards right he could spark some real change in this man - enough to turn himself in, and enough to free George.

“I care about you.”

The words seemed to bounce off the four walls of the basement, ringing in his own ears, and he found a confidence bubbling away inside him that led him to take to his feet, shaky, cautious steps carrying him towards Clayton. He stopped a few paces away, the man’s crying quieter now.

“You care about me.” George said, kneeling before him and looking at him with the same gentle gaze as before. “You know what you’ve done is wrong. You’re afraid.” He told him, wondering if Clayton had ever taken the time to consider his own emotions - if he’d ever even allowed himself to show emotions. “You can fix this, I can help you.”

George wasn’t entirely sure what he expected to come from saying that - if he had anticipated another (perhaps more successful) attempt on his life, or the immediate agreement that he could be freed and they would travel to the city together for Clayton to turn himself in.

But he didn’t expect Clayton to lean forward, draping his heavy frame over George and sobbing into him. George had no way of processing what was happening, so he simply let it happen. In fact, it quickly became evident that he had absolutely no ability to process any of his thoughts or actions, his hands moving to Clayton’s cheeks and pulling back - forcing the man to look at him. Despite the fact that he had been choked only moments ago, and perhaps somewhat because of it, he found his thumbs tracing his cheeks as he wiped away the tears that fell. Clayton’s skin was soft, freckles dusting his nose and cheeks, and George couldn’t look away from him. His eyelashes were long, it gave his face a more fragile look - it made it impossible to see him as a cold-blooded killer. His nose was slightly askew and George wondered what had caused that, a break? Perhaps he hadn’t always gotten away with his crimes so cleanly.

He couldn’t help it as his gaze fell to Clayton’s lips. They looked soft, they looked so distant from what he’d ever pictured the lips of a murderer to look like. And maybe the unfamiliar territory and the absurdity of the situation was what spurred him on, but before he could think twice he leaned forwards and pressed his lips to Clayton’s, his hands moving from the man’s cheeks to his shoulders, gripping as tightly as he dared let himself. He closed his eyes, savouring the short moment as the nausea in his stomach exploded into sparks. He was hungry for something he shouldn’t have, but the taboo of it all only made him more desperate to push for more.

George didn’t understand what he was doing, he couldn’t comprehend the scale of his actions, but his mind snapped back to reality the moment he felt a rush of cold air on his lips and concrete on his back. He was on the ground, alone, footsteps disappearing into the night and the door to the

basement closing once more.

He swallowed, closing his eyes and thinking.

What the *hell* had he done?

Chapter End Notes

i'm absolutely loving writing this fic, this was such a fun chapter! i hope you're all enjoying this so far, and starting to wonder where the end might take us!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

George woke up alone, in his bed, with the blankets covering his body.

He knew that wasn't how he'd fallen asleep, but he didn't think it wise to question how he'd gotten there. He didn't want to. The memories of the night before were still too muddled in his brain, his chest filled with regret as the ramifications of his actions hit home.

He had kissed Clayton. A serial killer. A man that tried to kill him. Clayton had run the moment he had realised what had happened, and George had cried. He wasn't really sure why he'd cried, it didn't feel like he'd been crying for the right reasons, but so much had happened in such a short period of time that he had barely had any time to comprehend it. His mind had run away from him, latched on to the man that had tried to kill him and yet had preserved his life. A man that, despite running away after the kiss last night, had returned to take George to his bed and make him comfortable. He didn't know how to feel about that.

He thought back to what he'd said to Clayton - *I care about you* - had that been true? He had always been kind but kind to a killer?

Perhaps .

George found himself waiting anxiously for Clayton's appearance that day, wanting nothing more than to speak to him again. He had seen the cracks in his mask break - both physically and metaphorically - and he knew that given a little bit more time he would be able to get through to the man. After all, in a matter of days he'd managed to get Clayton to trust him enough to cry in his arms. He wondered if it was strange to think of it like that - to think of *him* having to gain Clayton's trust when he was the one captured in his basement, but there was something about him that George sensed, something deeper, the *reason* behind his killings. Maybe he would never learn the truth, but he would try.

Time passed slowly - or maybe it passed quickly - and George was left alone with his thoughts as he waited for the man to appear once more. The now familiar sound of footsteps above his head and the door unlocking made his heart jump in his chest, looking towards the stairs eagerly as Clayton joined him.

This time he had no mask - although that had been smashed the day before - he had no gloves, he

had nothing to hide. George took the time to appreciate his appearance a little more, his soft hair bouncing as he made his way towards him, his fingers long and pale, scar tissue running along the backs of his hands from what he could only assume were altercations gone wrong.

“George.”

George swallowed. Clayton hadn't said his name before, and the way it rolled off his tongue gave the older man butterflies. Why he was so enchanted by his captor he didn't know, but he couldn't look away.

“Clayton.” He replied, just as soft as the other man.

“I cannot kill you.”

Clayton stopped walking, watching George from where he stood. George swallowed, looking away as he ran his tongue over his lips and considered his words.

“Can't or... Or *won't*?” George asked quietly.

“I can't...” Clayton's voice was quiet, the words leaving his body with a heavy sigh as his shoulders sagged and he found himself sinking to the ground - perching on the last step of the staircase and wrapping his arms tightly around his legs. “I don't understand...”

This was a new side to Clayton. George had seen him emotional the day before, he'd seen him upset, but this was something new and gentle. Emboldened by the softness of Clayton's frame, he approached him slowly. While Clayton seemed focused on his own thoughts he made sure to make his footsteps loud to let him know that someone was approaching.

“No one has ever said they cared.”

George stopped in his tracks a few steps away and Clayton looked up. His eyes were wide, sad, full of unexpressed emotion. This wasn't something the man had ever wanted to do - and George wondered if this was the first time he was truly expressing his own agency. If this was the first time he had ever made a conscious decision in his life.

“I care.” He said firmly, reiterating the point from the night before. “I care about you, Clayton.”

“Why would you do that?” His voice cracked, and something inside of George snapped. “I tried to kill you.”

“But you can’t.” George told him, kneeling down on the ground before him. “You’ve tried, more than once, and you know you can’t.”

“I don’t *want* to kill you.” Clayton elaborated. He watched George closely, his eyes memorising his every feature. “I want to do the right thing.”

“What is the right thing?” George asked. In the back of his mind he couldn’t stop thinking about how this could be a trick, a trap, something to lull him into a false sense of security to give Clayton another chance to strike, but something about the young man’s demeanour told him that this was entirely truthful.

“I have killed too many people.” He said. “Dozens. I felt nothing. It was a fun game to play, nothing more than that. But you... I can’t kill you. I feel *something* .”

“What do you feel?” George asked, and Clayton looked away. “Take your time.” He said patiently, reaching out and taking his hands gently. “I’m listening to you. *I care about you* .”

Hearing it again, Clayton choked on a sob. He had heard those words more from George in the last few hours than he had in his entire life before, and what had started as tiny cracks in the dam of his mind had quickly widened - emotions overflowing him. Regret, fear, sorrow, disgust.

“There is only one way to fix what I’ve done.”

“Clayton?”

Clayton pulled his hands away from George, reaching into a pocket and pulling out one of his knives. Rather than doing anything with it himself, he placed it into George’s hands and swallowed, a tear rolling down the bridge of his nose and dripping onto the floor between them.

“I deserve this.” He said, voice wavering. “I deserve to die for what I’ve done. I trust you to do this. The door is unlocked, you’re free to leave as soon as you finish. If there is a God, I know He will judge me.”

George looked at the knife in his hand, then looked to the trembling body of the man before him. Whatever he had been before, George could see the regret haunting him, and there was no trace of the man that had tried to kill him. How Clayton seemed to expect him to be able to kill him he didn’t understand, but he *couldn’t*.

“You said you trust me?” George began, placing the knife down on the floor. “We can fix this. But you have to trust me with more than just ending your life.”

Clayton’s shoulders shook, a soft whimper leaving his lips as he shook his head. “I don’t deserve anything else.” He managed to say, closing his eyes as more tears fell. “How can I live when I’ve killed so many other people?”

“I’ll help you.” George said, moving his hands to the younger man’s shoulders and squeezing just a little - enough pressure to remind him he wasn’t alone. “I promise. Something’s changed in you, don’t let that go. We can do this.”

The distance between the two of them had gradually shrunk throughout their conversation, and now they were inches apart. Clayton found himself remembering the previous night - something he was certain that George was also replaying - and his stomach churned as he remembered how quickly he’d run. He regretted it, of course, but the sensation had been entirely new. He’d never grown so close to another person before, he’d certainly never held any romantic feelings towards anyone and this man, George, had entirely changed his life. He wondered how long he had needed that push, perhaps if someone had told him they loved him years ago none of this would ever have happened. Perhaps if someone had cared for him, or even just *seen* him, he wouldn’t have done any of what he had.

More tears fell from his eyes, his breathing now quick and shallow. He felt as though he had nothing left to lose, closing the last little bit of space between them and pressing a chaste kiss to George’s lips. It was brief, too quick to really give George the time to reciprocate, but it felt like a wave of relief crashed over his body. It was wrong, he knew deep down that it was wrong, but he didn’t care. Someone cared about him, someone saw through his walls and was willing to give him a second chance.

“I trust you.” He said, his body sagging as he leaned forwards and rested his forehead on George’s shoulder.

“Then I hope you’ll forgive me.” George whispered to him, holding Clayton close with one arm as he reached down with the other. As his fingers curled around the hilt of the knife, beginning to raise his arm once more, he shifted their bodies so he could press another kiss to Clayton’s lips. This time, he didn’t run away. It was slow and gentle, Clayton moving his hands to the back of George’s head to hold him close and refuse to let him break the moment. It was something they needed - the kind of physical comfort they both craved even if everything told them it was wrong.

Clayton tried to deepen the kiss, his teeth biting down on George’s lips but the older man pulled back just a little - resting his forehead against Clayton’s as he whispered, his breath hot as he spoke against him.

“I’m so sorry.”

With the words finally muttered, he moved in complete synchronization with himself. He pressed another kiss to Clayton’s lips, deepening it in response to the younger man’s silent request, and he jerked his hand upwards. He felt the resistance of Clayton as the knife plunged into his stomach, his own hand shaking as the only response from the man was a quiet moan into his mouth - salty tears somehow managing to mix with their saliva. George continued to kiss him as he twisted the knife, tears now falling from his own eyes as he forced himself to continue. He could feel the quiet mewls of pain, and Clayton gradually became more and more unresponsive. When he stopped kissing and felt the man slouch forward against his chest George pulled back. Clayton was pale and his eyes were closed, and George knew he had done what he had to do.

As he pulled the knife out of Clayton’s stomach and watched him bleed on the ground he could only hope that he’d done enough. He struggled to his feet, trying his hardest to find the energy he needed to put one foot in front of the other time and time again as he emerged from the basement - seeing the outside world for the first time in days.

The sun was setting, it would be night before he reached the city, he could only hope that Nicolas and Darryl were in their office late. He *had* to see them, it was the only chance he had.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry not sorry 'bout what I did ;)

Also, HOLY SHIT SOMEONE DID FANART OF MY FIC!!!!!! Please please go check it out! <https://twitter.com/FayDoesThings/status/1278991955519770624>

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The sun had dipped beneath the horizon as George stumbled into the outskirts of the city. While his injuries were healing he knew that he was a sight for sore eyes, and it wasn't long before he was stopped in his tracks by a woman concerned for his wellbeing. Taking in a deep breath, knowing that once he began speaking there was no going back, he asked her to find a policeman. He was taken back to her home and sat down in front of a fire - George feeling warmth returning to his body for the first time in days - and left with a cup of water as she promised to return quickly with someone that could help.

George watched the flicker of the fire, embers sparking and crackling in a way that pleased him greatly. It was something so small that he had barely appreciated it before, but after the last few days he could take nothing for granted. The odds of him surviving the attack, and continuing to be allowed to live at Clayton's mercy, must have been so impossibly small... He sipped slowly from the cup, feeling his head growing heavy, it would be so easy to fall fast asleep and let his mind and body begin to recover from his ordeal, but there was still the pressing matter of Clayton. He tried not to think of the damage he had done, tried not to remember the quiet noises of pain he had made as he'd stabbed him, and tried not to picture the image of him lying still on the ground. The fear of what he'd done was too much to bear, he couldn't let himself think about it.

He dropped one hand from the cup, fingers playing with the ends of the rug he was sat on to pass the time. It was soft, something else he'd never truly appreciated before being taken. Although he had been given blankets and a place to sleep he had been given almost nothing, and his senses were suddenly overwhelmed with the *everything* around him - life seemed so much *fuller* than it had before.

"Mr Hutchinson!"

George turned around and saw a familiar police officer standing in the doorway of the woman's home, feeling a cool breeze pull through the house and sap the warmth from the fire.

"You're alive!" He said, incredulous. "I can take you to the station, anything you can tell us will be of great help. I'll call ahead and have someone--"

"I have to go back." He said quickly, cutting in before the officer had any chance to stop him. "I wasn't the only one there." George told him, swallowing his nerves as he began to plant the first seeds of his lie. "He's hurt."

"I'll call for the detectives to join us." He replied. "We can pay a visit in a moment. Thank you for finding me ma'am, we'll be out of your hair shortly." The officer said, bidding the woman a farewell before quickly taking off outside again. She crossed to George and offered him a smile, helping him to his feet. He took it gratefully, finding his balance a little off after spending time sat in front of the warmth of the fire. It had relaxed him, he *wanted* to sleep, but he needed to go back for Clayton. Every second that passed was another second that he was unconscious on the ground, bleeding out, and George was terrified that this had all been a horrible mistake - maybe there would have been a better way to do this, maybe he could have just *talked* to Clayton about it. But Clayton had been so drastically upset, so resolutely set on his life ending, that if he were conscious when the officers arrived George had no doubt that he would attempt to turn himself in. At least this way there'd be a chance that things would go right.

Several minutes passed before the officer returned, promising George that Darryl and Nicholas had been called and that they would convene at the outskirts of the city together before continuing their journey as one.

Night had well and truly fallen by the time the four of them had set off together. Nicholas and Darryl seemed to be entirely in shock at George's continued existence, too shocked to ask any questions. For now, the focus was on Clayton. George was relieved that the attention wasn't on him, it gave him time to think over his plan again and again, to practice his acting, to perfect exactly what he was going to say, he couldn't risk Clayton being caught out by the officers or the detectives. And he couldn't risk himself being caught lying - he had no idea what would happen to him if he was caught colluding with a killer.

Nausea crept in on him as they approached the home, George leaning over to the officer so he could quietly tell him to pull over. His stomach was in knots, full of fear regarding Clayton's condition, though he didn't let on. As the two cabs came to a halt outside of the house, Darryl and Nicholas helped George from where he sat. He figured he must've looked white as a ghost, and that no one really trusted him to walk unaccompanied. He had to admit, he felt the same way.

"We'll take you both back to the station." Darryl explained to George. "Have a medic see to your injuries and let you rest a little before we question you."

George nodded, deciding for now that it would be easier to play along. If this was what it took to clear Clayton's name then so be it, he would do whatever was required. He was glad for the night, the cover of darkness hiding his fists teasing the hem of his shirt nervously as the four rounded the back of the house. The basement door was open and George found himself holding his breath, terrified that Clayton had run, or that someone else had stumbled across the home and had seen what lay inside, but to his surprise the young man was sat against a wall in the corner of the basement - far from the door and looking so much smaller than he had before. He looked so fragile, so pale and broken, bags under his eyes now prominent in his face. Blood had pooled around him, the knife sitting just out of reach, and George couldn't help himself. He vomited

again, like he had done the first night he had been trapped. It had come out of nowhere but he had managed to aim away from the detectives, pulling away from Darryl's guiding arm and falling to his knees - his hands rested on the ground and supporting him as he retched.

"George!" Nicholas said, moving quickly to his side. George missed what was said next, a faint direction to the officer to search the inside of the building and, if safe, bring some water. Darryl entered the basement, approaching Clayton gingerly and holding up his hands to show that he was no threat.

"I'm here to help." Darryl said, his voice as soft as could be. "You're safe now, your friend found us. We'll get you help, we'll fix your wound." He said, offering a smile as he tried to coax Clayton into trusting him. He didn't respond, his slow breathing and arrhythmic blinks the only thing to prove that he was still alive, and Darryl's smile strained just a little. "You're in shock." He explained.

The sound of George throwing up again was enough to grab Clayton's attention and Darryl's face became much more sympathetic. He was unsurprised that these two gentlemen had grown close - especially given they had likely been the only company the other had for a number of days.

"I'm sure he'll feel better with you by his side." He said, offering a hand to help Clayton to his feet. Still remaining silent, Clayton obliged. The pain in his side made it difficult to walk at any sort of speed, but right now his priority was getting to George's side. He was beginning to understand the plan that the older man had set in motion and was quite happy to play his part, but he *needed* to know that George was okay.

He was guided slowly through the basement, his legs struggling to keep him upright even with Darryl's support, but once he reached the staircase and could *see* George he found a new lease of energy.

"George--" He whispered quietly, a hand moving to grab the banister as tightly as possible as he pulled himself up, watching the officer give George the water he needed to settle his stomach.

"Clayton." Came a quiet reply. George's throat hurt from the vomit, bile and acid burning his insides and causing more discomfort than he cared to let on. For now though, all that mattered was the fact that Clayton was standing in front of him - conscious and alive. Despite the deep crimson staining his shirt George felt a flood of relief flowing through his veins and was quick to pull the taller man into a hug. There was no threat this time, no fear of his own demise, he could simply take solace in the fact that the two of them were safe. There was still an awful lot of work to do to convince the police that the two of them really *had* been abducted, they both had to be nursed back to full health, and George needed to understand Clayton enough to truly change him - he knew that the man hadn't been rehabilitated overnight. George felt Clayton's tight hold around him,

responding and clinging to his shirt just a little bit tighter. He could feel Clayton pressing his head against George's shoulder, and George was certain he could hear faint apologies whispered over and over again into his ear. If they were alone, George may have responded with a kind word, reassuring Clayton gently that everything would be okay. But under the watchful eye of the detectives and the police he couldn't risk revealing who Clayton was, or admitting his true feelings for the man. They would have to remain closely guarded for now.

As they embraced in the cold of the middle of winter, under the cover of darkness with a blanket of stars above them, George just *knew* that his plan would work. However worried he was about the next few days, so long as he was at Clayton's side things would be just fine.

Chapter End Notes

OH MY GOD IT'S ALMOST FINISHED I'M SO TIRED I CANNOT WAIT TO REST!!

Epilogue to come tomorrow, then I'm going to be taking a bit of a break from posting (apparently writing 40K in 3 weeks and updating daily takes a lot of energy, who'd've thought it?!) but I'm starting to plan and write my Manhunt AU and I'm having a BLAST - without a doubt it's going to be my longest fic, but I may also split it up. So you know the drill, jump over to Twitter and vote!

<https://twitter.com/amooniesong/status/1279355274361479169>

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Luck had been on George and Clayton's side.

While Nicholas had been easy to sway, Darryl had remained suspicious of the situation for longer but eventually appeared to give in. Once George and Clayton were back to full strength they had been allowed to return home, and the two of them hadn't questioned doing that together - starting afresh far, far away.

They had collected the belongings that had meant something to them, packed their bags, and sold anything that was left. The money they had scraped together was enough for the two of them to journey to France and buy a small plot of land. A new life was what they needed, to escape the world that they had lived in before and to let themselves start over. George couldn't imagine going back to inventing: his life before tainted by the memories of those horrifying few days. While he had fallen for Clayton, he couldn't deny the trauma of the experience. Clayton himself was relieved to be away from England - away from the life that he had led before, able to start over and live a life of kindness, of hard work, of *love*. It was difficult at first, regret filling his every waking hour for months on end, but George had been by his side through it all, there to listen as he spoke of his childhood - the cruelties of his parents and peers, the darkness of the world that had shaped him into the man he had been - and to hold him as he cried for the things that he had done. George helped to build him back up, and Clayton could never be more thankful.

Hidden away in the small corner of the French countryside, focusing on each other, their crops and their cattle, it had been easy to avoid the changing of the world around them. Isolated in their own little bubble it was easy to remain blissfully ignorant of trouble bubbling on the horizon. But as the years passed the quiet rumbles of change grew into cacophonies of thunder and it was impossible to ignore any longer.

The world was at war.

Clayton and George abandoned their home to fight - conscripted by the French armies to protect the land that had become their home. They were assigned to the same regiment, and their peaceful lives together came to an abrupt end. Gentle sunrises and lazy mornings were replaced with the pungent smell of lethal gas and the sound of gunfire, fear constantly etched onto their faces as time and time again they witnessed their partner in danger. Both George and Clayton would rather take on the entire German army alone if it meant the other never had to clamber over the top again.

"We will make it through this." George said one night, the two of them unable to sleep in their

bunks. "So long as we have each other, this war cannot last forever."

It had seemed obvious at the time - but the intensity of the war only seemed to increase, the numbers of soldiers arriving in the trenches increasing every day, there was no sign of the war coming to a close. Weeks turned to months turned to years, nightmares plagued the two men when they could sleep and, when they could not, exhaustion sat heavy in their bones. Neither had made it through unscathed, but both were still, miraculously, alive.

When the order came that they would be advancing on the Western Front, neither man was surprised. They would make their move under the cover of darkness, the enemies wouldn't expect an attack. Preparation took place as normal, Clayton and George managed to find a brief moment to say their prayers together - to promise each other that they would be safe and reunited again soon. It had worked every time before, and they were certain it would work again.

But, with all things, their luck came to an end. Although it was questionable to call what happened *luck* .

As they began their assault, clambering over the top and beginning to run with their gear, guns loaded and ready to fire, it became obvious that they hadn't taken the enemy by surprise quite as much as they'd expected to.

Their regiment was met with a shower of bullets and shells, the world around them exploding. It was difficult to see where the grenades landed in the dark - George hearing the familiar sound of the cries of men being blown apart and thrown away, as if they were *nothing* . He had become desensitized to it and continued to run, the number of soldiers advancing thinning out with each moment that passed. Of course they had lost men during attacks before but this... He had never seen so few people running towards the enemy - and George wondered if this was it. He wasn't ready to die, he wasn't ready to lose Clayton, but he kept running. Turning around meant desertion, and he would be shot for that anyway.

A loud yell pulled him out of his thoughts and brought him to a skidding halt. There was one thing he was still attuned to, one thing that caught his attention no matter what was happening. *Clayton being hurt* .

As he turned to look around he saw the taller man stumbling, his chest covered with a thick liquid that reflected the moonlight and the flashes of explosions. There was only one thing that could be, and George scrambled to his side to catch him moments before he fell into the mud.

"Clayton!" He whispered, the younger man somewhat dazed as he searched for where the voice

came from. This wasn't a bullet to the shoulder, or a broken bone, this wasn't something that could heal and they both knew that - they didn't need to say that out loud.

"George..." He said faintly, the corner of his lips twitching into the smallest of smiles for a brief second as he looked up at the other man. "Y'shouldn't stay still, they'll... They'll get you..."

George shook his head, blinking back tears and feeling some kind of laugh claw its way out of his throat. How the hell Clayton could think he gave a damn about being shot now was beyond him - but Clayton had *always* surprised him.

"Yeah." He said, giving a small shrug of his shoulder and moving one hand to lace it with Clayton's, his other arm still cradling the man close to him. "But I've got you."

Clayton chuckled, though the chuckle soon became a cough and splatters of blood left his mouth. George could sense his discomfort and adjusted their position, sitting them both up to make it a little easier for him to breathe. He knew it wouldn't last for too long, but George was relieved to hear his breaths become a little less laboured.

"George?" Clayton said quietly, George nodding and offering him a soft, reassuring smile. He sniffled, trying to hold in his tears and keep as composed as possible for as long as he could. "I love you."

A pained sob shook his body and George just pulled Clayton closer. This wasn't the end, it *couldn't be* the end. Something would happen, they'd find a way to pull through, this *wasn't the end*.

"I love you too." George told him, rocking their bodies back and forth as he tried desperately to distract himself from the inevitable. He leaned down to press a kiss to his lover, not giving a damn about the consequences if anyone saw. This was going to be the last time that he could hold Clayton, and he wouldn't let the man leave this world without knowing just how loved he was. He dared to deepen the kiss just a little, closing his eyes and pretending that everything was okay. In his mind he could pretend that this was all just a horrible nightmare - that he would wake up tangled in bed sheets with Clayton's body pressed firm against his, the two refusing to move for hours on end as they relished each other's company, their warmth. Perhaps they would indulge in something a little more passionate than just holding each other, or maybe they would demonstrate their love through smaller gestures throughout the day - George would give anything to face those questions again.

George was so caught up in those thoughts that when the bullet passed through his head, he was

dead before he even had time to register what had happened.

Several miles away the world was quiet, a gentle breeze blowing through the coats of the two men standing side by side. One lit a cigarette silently, the ringing sound of the two shots fired beginning to fade. The night sky was obscured by a thick blanket of clouds, making the trenches just a little bit darker than they would have been. With a squelch of mud beneath his feet, Darryl stepped away from the periscope rifle and turned to face the General beside him, offering his hand.

“Merci, Général Bruneau.” He smiled, shaking the man’s hand before bidding him farewell.

For some, 25 years might have been enough to give up on a case. But Darryl was nothing if not patient. As he returned to his post, he chuckled to himself.

“Affaire classée.”

Chapter End Notes

BEFORE YOU YELL AT ME I MADE A THERAPY DISCORD SERVER FOR PEOPLE READING MY FANFICS! Feel free to ask me for the link!

as i've mentioned previously i'm going to be taking a break from posting for a few weeks, apparently writing 40k in three weeks and uploading everyday is exhausting! who'd've guessed it? i'm going to be working on the trilogy for the manhunt and i'm having a lot of fun with that at the moment, so i hope when i start to post you'll have forgiven me for this ending and will come back to read some more :D

thank you as always to everyone that's supported feeling and now this fic, catch me on twitter or discord and i'll see you in a few weeks for "The Beginning?"

End Notes

Thanks to everyone that's read and supported Feeling, now the fic is finished this is my new baby! I've got the fic planned out but as always I welcome your feedback and ideas, so please feel free to let me know how you're enjoying it so far!

As always, please don't share this with anyone featured in the fic. If they express discomfort regarding fanfiction or shipping I'll take this down in line with their wishes.

Also, I have a Twitter! Come say hi (if you're over 18)! <https://twitter.com/amooniesong>

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!